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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

23 October 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Probable Israeli Reaction to the Sinking of the Eilat*

1. The Israelis are probably planning a retaliatory blow against the UAR for the sinking of their destroyer Eilat on Saturday. A decision on Israel's response to the sinking of the Eilat may have been taken at the Cabinet meeting on Sunday. A high level emissary has been dispatched to the US to confer with the Israeli Foreign Minister and with US officials on Tuesday. He is unlikely to return to Israel before Wednesday morning. The Israelis may not make any retaliatory move before the emissary's return, but we cannot rule out an earlier action.

* Representatives of the Office of Current Intelligence and the DDP participated in the preparation of this Memorandum.

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2. [] suggests that the attack was authorized at the highest level of the UAR Government. The Israelis believe that this was the case. They have noted that UAR forces had been in an unusual state of alert for some days.

3. However the Israelis interpret Egyptian intentions, they will be alert to the possibility that the destruction of the Eilat will convince many Arabs that they only need a little more expertise in order to use Soviet weapons effectively against Israel. The Israelis probably consider the attack represents a change of policy by the Egyptians indicating a resurgence of belligerency. The Israeli Government almost certainly estimates that to permit this strike to go unavenged would encourage the Arabs to further military acts. And while the Israelis have sent two notes to the UN protesting the UAR's attack, they have been careful not to request UN action which would inhibit a forceful Israeli response, i.e., they have not requested a special Security Council meeting.

4. On the question of what kind of retaliatory move Israel should make, there are almost certainly those in high places who, even before the sinking of the Eilat, advocated a resumption of the war with the object of toppling Nasser. We think it highly

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unlikely that such drastic counsel was accepted by the Cabinet. There may, however, be those who believe that limited retaliations, if heavy enough, might finish Nasser.

5. We believe it likely that any retaliation would be designed to dramatize Israeli military superiority. We think the Israeli retaliation will be against the UAR alone and that it will not involve crossing the de facto borders with ground forces intended to occupy new territory. We would not exclude the possibility of raids against terrorist bases in Syria, but think them unlikely.

6. We believe that the most likely means of retaliation would be an air strike because of the speed and flexibility it affords and because the Israeli Navy does not have the capability to find and engage the Egyptian Navy in a manner suited to the situation. The Egyptian Navy seems the most likely target, but its ships are being dispersed. If the Israeli Air Force cannot find suitable ship targets they might strike at Egyptian naval bases in Alexandria, Port Said, and along the Red Sea coast. They might, of course, consider this insufficient retribution and seize the opportunity to strike at air bases where they might be able to find some of the Soviet aircraft sent as replacements for those destroyed in June. Another possibility is an artillery attack across the Suez Canal.

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7. Whatever the exact measures of retaliation decided upon, the Israelis will seize the occasion to make the point to the world that the Arabs, having provoked a war in June and suffered an overwhelming defeat, are still adamant in their refusal to acknowledge realities and accept the settlement which Israel offers. They will hope to make it clear that Israel is ready to administer another military defeat on the Arabs, and another, and another until the Soviets stop arming them or until the Arabs decide to reach a settlement.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

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ABBOT SMITH
Acting Director

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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director

Prepared in response to your request
this morning.

ABBOT SMITH
Acting Director
National Estimates

23 October 1967
(DATE)

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